



Smokefree Ninja Newsletter

Turning "Ha-Ha" moments into "A-Ha" moments

Publisher: René Hicks--"Nth Degree Smokefree Ninja" & Lung Cancer Survivor

Smokefree Ninja Report

I am beginning 2013 focusing on Feb--"Black History Month", because tobacco has had such a tremendous impact on American history, but by far the greatest on Black American history. Tobacco was the export that established the American economy and this necessitated the enslavement of blacks for the purpose of the cultivation of this lucrative, but labor intensive commodity. If Black History Month is to be a true celebration of African-American accomplishment, the devastating effects of tobacco on this community has to be addressed and eliminated. The history of tobacco and Blacks in America from slavery to present has been intricately and inequitably woven. Enslaved to pick it and now enslaved to smoke it--resulting in profits for the tobacco companies vs. death and disease for African-Americans. And since Black History is a part of American History, I want to strongly urge all Americans who work in tobacco control and prevention and/or minority health to use Black History Month as a tipping point for being present day tobacco-related abolitionists.

I especially want to appeal to Historically Black Colleges & Universities to implement tobacco-free policies on their campuses--not enough of the HBCUs have such policies in effect. Shouldn't the long held HBCU mission of advancing the education of Blacks include how tobacco has been integral to the enslavement of Blacks--past and present? Let's encourage HBCUs to issue an "Emancipation Proclamation"--to free their campuses from the ravages of tobacco enslavement.

Ninja Notables: Acknowledgements should be given to two HBCU campuses, I've had the extreme pleasure to speak at, that have implemented tobacco-free policies: **Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO went tobacco-free Jan 1, 2013 and the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff in Pine Bluff, AR which has been tobacco-free since 2009.** Both these HBCU campuses are ensuring that the history of tobacco-related enslavement of Black Americans does not keep repeating itself.

On a lighter note, I need to address the inappropriateness of making Feb the month for Black historical celebration. Black folks slaved away for centuries and get the shortest month to celebrate their history and then have to share 3 days of the month celebrating Cupid, Abraham Lincoln and George Washington--nary a one being Black. Ok, for obvious reasons--Lincoln gets a pass. Also, Blacks were brought from the hottest climates in Africa to the hottest climates in America and we get **FEB--the COLDEST month???** We don't like being outside in the cold! If we did, then we Black folks would be outdoors skiing in Feb, instead of indoors playing basketball--**HELLO!!** (yes, some stereotypes are based on factual evidence--I've done the research!). And since, as previously stated, the cultivation of tobacco was the primary reason for instituting slavery, please note--the weather in Feb isn't exactly prime tobacco picking weather. Thus, as a member, in good standing, of Black folks of America, I demand a revote and place Aug into nomination--a month not shared with any other holidays of note and with 31 hot days!!

Smokefree Ninja History

In feudal Japan, the Ninja took the most difficult assignments very few others wanted to take. The Ninja specialized in using unorthodox and oft times covert methods to complete their assignment.

I was raised to be an advocacy Ninja, as I was raised by parents, who grew up in the segregated South, who were forced by dehumanizing discrimination to navigate their lives in a Ninja-like manner--not just to survive--but thrive. They believed in getting things done, no matter how difficult the challenge--using every legal means available; fighting the good fight--to right the wrongs; to be the best possible person you could be--no matter the obstacles--even the degradation of racial prejudice--not an excuse. They often told me "to be a credit to the Negro race"--not a debit; a positive--not a negative. Therefore, being an activist has been integral to my life--even as a comedian, I turned my comedy act into comedy activism.

So, when my life was altered by getting lung cancer, necessitating a partial lung removal--without ever having been a smoker, but by working as a comedian in smoky comedy clubs, I had an issue--a fight to be fought; a wrong to be righted. Hence, the Ninja persona was donned and since I use humor to get the message across about the evils of "Big Tobacco" and to encourage others to take action, i.e. Ninja recruitment, I consider this to be very much an effective Ninja way of waging war against the tobacco companies and in the process--be a credit to my race--the "**Ninja-Negro**" race.

Tobacco + African-Americans = **DEATH!!!**

- ◆ Tobacco use is the #1 killer of African-Americans
- ◆ African-Americans are more likely to suffer from chronic and preventable diseases associated with smoking
- ◆ Half of all deaths in African-Americans are from diseases caused by smoking
- ◆ 47,000 African-Americans die annually from a preventable smoking related disease
- ◆ There is evidence that mentholated cigarettes spread a greater amount of smoke particles that cause a higher rate of lung cancer than non-mentholated brands - Approximately three of every four African-American smokers smoke menthol cigarettes
- ◆ Tobacco companies design advertising campaigns specifically targeting the African-American community that exploit black culture and music as tools to addict the African-American community

Info provided by: NAATPN
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Smokefree Ninja Profile

René Hicks is a unique composite: daughter of a Pentecostal preacher, collegiate Academic All-American distance runner, former accountant, award-winning comedian, lung cancer survivor, advocacy Ninja, tobacco prevention activist & humor healer. René was the first African-American woman ever nominated for an American Comedy Award for "Best Female Stand-Up". She was twice voted Comedian of the Year. René is now in great demand on the lecture circuit. She is especially popular at high schools & colleges/universities--having appeared at over 750 campuses. She also has numerous TV appearances, including on her own show - Comedy Central Presents... René Hicks.

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